

What I Bring to a Knife Fight

The room here is a little bigger, but it holds a lot more.
This is the room where I had my last kiss.
I make a pile in this place of all the things I used to know:
the shelves are my portrait, but the drawers I keep private.
The drawers are where I keep the knife,
most of the time, except when I'm in pain.

We like to complain that this place is a pain.
I'm a little reserved and you talk more,
you brought the love and the snacks, the forks and the knives.
I think about the moment when we'll kiss,
but only in the parts of this room that are private.
If you never ask me, I can never say no.

Here are the jokes that only we know.
We go to great pains
to ensure nothing stays private,
but I think one of us is saying less and one is saying more.
You say who you meet and who you hate and who you kiss.
I keep my hand under the pillow, next to my knife.

When you leave, I replace you with the knife.
It is the only other cure I know.
It touches me like a kiss,
and I revel in premium pain.
How many times, how many secrets, before I stop wanting more?
How many can I keep private?

In this open space, you lend me these inches of privacy,
but you are suspicious of the knife.
I make a point to believe that less is more.
At the bottoms of all your piles of knowledge, are the pieces you don't want to know.
That's where you keep your pain...
Am I an idiot, or is that also where you keep the kiss?

And what is the meaning, what is the future, what is the point, of the kiss?
You are not in the business of keeping things private.

I'm wrong to want a pleasure that only disguises pain.
Shit like this is why I need the knife!
“Why was your knife under your pillow?” you ask me, because you know.
Well, someday it won't matter anymore.

I return the kiss, on the tip of my knife.
You know, that I know, that nothing in this place is private.
I convince myself that I need you. But I need the pain more.

The Gas Station

This girl from five years ago.
She stuck up her middle finger,
at a gas station.
My memory paints her with scarlet hair
and eyeliner and a lip piercing.
Black lipstick curled in a sneer.
This cool girl.
She yelled FAGGOT in the parking lot.
My mom said tch,
and rolled up the driver's side window.
I was this mouse in the passenger seat.
In high school I,
learned to play the drum,
in the same way I learned to sign my name.
A signature has a rhythm to it.
Like the trademark sound of a bass drum,
so hollow when a snare is sharper.
It echoes.
My favorite word back then was
Whatever.
You could fling it at anyone,
the way false redheads fling
FAGGOT around the gas station.
When dreamboat boys hated me
for spitting on the ground
while I ran,
I bought a box of purple hair dye.
If life is war, which it is,
my purple flare gun signalled the allies,
the broken bitches
on the gravelly blacktop,
to define me.
A blonde girl with a smoky eye

built on yesterday's mascara
tattooed me
with a needle and bottle of ink,
and a candle lighter from her garage.
The tattoo said FAGGOT
right under my boob
like a signature,
in someone else's handwriting.
She planted a kiss next to it
after she was done stabbing me.
I wanted to like that, but,
Kissing blue-eyed band boys behind the bleachers
felt like more.
If life is war, then that was treason.
I learned to drive,
fuelled up at the gas station,
drove my boyfriend around.
In the hallways,
I held his hand, and they said,
What are you trying to prove, FAGGOT?
If I sheared off my purple hair
they'd only say it louder.
I graduated to snare drum,
dressed sharp,
ran my finger under my boob
and felt the pinprick lie.
In college, my favorite word
was sorry.
A lot of people liked to hear that
and I liked to make them happy.
I wore my hair brown,
I wore my hair long,
I didn't play the drum anymore,
but I learned piano.
Under my boob a secret word
reminded me that
bold, bright-haired, boy-crazy, bliss
had powered the word FAGGOT
in the parking lot
five years ago.
But I didn't need to throw it.
I kept it with me always,
safe under my skin,
like a favorite word.

When You *Need It*

I drank a bottle of sugar water.
Made the clouds into noses then.
And I sat underneath them all
and I made a mistake,
you said.

That burned,
on a cloudy day,
I wish I'd crawled under my bed
where there was no smoke.

You watched me find the maze,
and grow tumors,
and go minotaur.

I bicycled into bushes and
into people's houses.
I made mashed potatoes
out of stupid things.
I could have smiled at blood,
if I'd had a cup of it,
and I might have.
I pondered whale fish
briefly. They didn't make sense.

And I almost forgot you.
But you know when to reel in your catch,
huh?

Overall,
it's a bit like a circus.
When I'm funny,
they clap and give me
peanuts,
something like peanuts.

And if I find a clam shell
before it's over,

more power to you.

If you think that's funny,
take down your signs.
I never really guessed
that paint would
change me.

When I get home again
I'll worry,
but not before.

I think I'm getting better.
I think I want a sugar cube.